

## ***Shrouded in Myth and Legend: Debunking the Myths of the Underground Railroad***

*by Aaron P. Goffney*

The Underground Railroad pre-Civil War was shrouded in secrecy, quiet local people, romanticism, and legend. Historians who have written about this history often failed to highlight the intricacies that involved a more complex narrative of black migration and mobility, abolitionists, fugitive slaves, and free blacks who navigated together toward emancipation. Historians have debated the truth of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) and runaway slaves has been debated for well over a century. This essay will provide an extensive examination of past historical writings on the UGRR and how they changed over time. These past writings have often eliminated African Americans as active agents who should be included within this story, while others have added to the argument, essentially debunking the myth that slaves were passive and complacent under the institution of slavery in the South.

The books and authors discussed include Henrietta Buckmaster's, Wilbur Siebert's *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*; and author Larry Gara and his analysis, which most historians recognize as the catalyst that broke the traditional narratives of this history, titled *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. In addition, the examination of abolitionist William Still, author of *The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia* adds the missing link of fugitive slaves' voices in which Still records the experiences through their journey to Canada. The addition of John Hope Franklin's book titled *Runaway Slaves* fills the gap with the scholarship of slave resistance rarely seen in academia. Other books such as Eric Foner's *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* and Alice Baumgartner's *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War* provide a current

synthesis that detail further analysis on the Underground Railroad's historiography from a new regional perspective that was not explored by past historians. The inspiration for this essay derived from how school districts teach black history in primary and secondary education. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become one of the most debated topics in households to the U.S. Congress, led by right wing politicians. Books such as *Critical Race Theory*, written by Kimberlé Crenshaw introduce a slew of authors who present a foundational collection of essays that discusses CRT. Crenshaw notes, "the task of CRT to remind readers of the importance of tools that aid in thinking about race, how racial power is produced and experienced in social life, and more importantly, how CRT recognizes how political interventions are overlooked in the ways in which people of color are situated in communities and subcommunities."<sup>1</sup>

Theoretically, Michel-Rolph Trouillot is important to this work as he discusses how archival power plays a significant role in how history is interpreted throughout academia. In his book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, he challenges how history is produced and how it works from the moment of creation—sources, archives, narratives, and the final instance of history making—the four crucial moments in producing history.<sup>2</sup> *Silencing the Past*, also challenges the narratives of the victors and the cultural hegemony of European historians who control and contribute to archival power that produce these narratives—essentially obscuring interpretations that contribute to a complete historicity in favor of the story as told by the victors. The power of a story indeed lies in the power of the narrative that requires dual participation of

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010), xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 2.

both fact and story, and the responsibility of processing this knowledge using a sociohistorical process derived from society's cultural settings.

Past historians writing on the Underground Railroad negate the risks, the courage, and the cerebral planning of strong black individuals who succeeded in completing this perilous journey. Furthermore, it negates those who suffered and died in their quest for freedom. Moreover, this multi-racial movement has also been described as a movement led by white abolitionists who risked their lives to release black people from bondage. This false representation of this network has inspired historians --who recognized the plight of misinformation -- to dive deeper into this scholarship to provide an accurate synthesis that debunks the historical myths and legends. As stated earlier, the inspiration for this historiographical essay derived from Denise Dallmar, author, and professor at Northern Kentucky University who conducted a graduate research seminar on the Underground Railroad to bring to life the deep local history that embodies the essence of both Kentucky and Ohio. The author recognizes the plight of misinformation while promoting a research seminar for grade schoolteachers in both states. Dallmar's pedagogical approach consisted of guest speakers, educational videos, visits to local museums, website research, design techniques, and field photography to document the progress. Moreover, this work highlights many new key players discovered in the archives such as William Still, Levi Coffin, and John Rankin who contributed to this freedom movement without discrediting heroes such as Harriet Tubman.

Academic scholarship published in 1898 by Wilbur Siebert explores how the Underground Railroad operated within oblivion and secrecy. Siebert pored through writings that described the efforts of abolitionists who cooperated with slaves and free peoples of color. Authors such as Henry Wilson in the *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, Von Holst in the *History of the United States*, and William Still, whose collection of records are interwoven throughout his book,

were often followed by more works from abolitionists as conductors and overseers of the UGRR movement. Before historians began to challenge how this history was researched and written during the late eighteenth century, one must understand the engine that drove those who were enslaved to freedom has always been hotly contested. These polemic debates derived from intentionally omitting agents, operators and key persons who were just as relevant to the destruction of slavery as legislation, war, and policy. Siebert deemed Still's work as limited to the needy fugitive slaves that came to Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> Siebert sheds light on this comprehensive history that traveled throughout two generations, where he challenged historians in the late eighteenth century to recognize fifty years of secret engagements by abolitionists who assisted fugitive slaves that navigated underground, through free states toward Canada, to gain their freedom.

Siebert viewed abolitionists as zealous in their endeavors to rid the nation of slavery. The religious beliefs mentioned in his book make up the moral cause of the movement found in his ode to Theodore Parker who was considered the mouthpiece of all northern abolitionists.<sup>4</sup> Parker's allegiance to freedom and slavery, according to the author lay at the cross section of Christianity, humanity, and manhood. These heroic efforts of agents, station-keepers, and conductors of this system to achieve emancipation were deemed by the author as impressive and unselfish, considering the perilous consequences involved.<sup>5</sup> Siebert's extensive collection of oral histories that details the road to freedom are credited mainly to religious groups, which situates those in bondage in a passive role of enslavement. Trouillot believes that in tandem with U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (San Diego, CA: Dialectic Press, 2015), 86.

<sup>4</sup> Wilbur Henry Siebert, 101.

<sup>5</sup> Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (San Diego, CA: Dialectic Press, 2015), 1352.

exceptionalism, America's deep rooted historical past derived from religious rhetoric. The author states, "Let us not forget that, quite recently, in many parts of the United States national and world history prolonged a providential narrative with strong religious undertones."<sup>6</sup> Not withholding the heroic efforts of abolitionists such as Parker, these myths and legends lay at the heart of oral histories that Siebert details because any evidence of tangible materials from the movement carried grave consequences to both the enslaved and activists. Yet the stories of slaves and freedmen were not at the center of the Underground Railroad's accomplishments until the mid- to late twentieth century.

Larry Gara notes that, "New England is the source of morality and civilization, and the Underground Railroad work is in part illustrative of the superiority of character of New England emigrants to the west."<sup>7</sup> Early twentieth century discourse continued to focus primarily on Quakers, Puritans, Calvinists, and white abolitionists as the main protagonists, as well as organizational networks that highlighted only a few blacks, such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Thomas Garrett. Evil influences of the South, such as slavery, were curtailed by the religious beliefs and educational institutions provided by New England abolitionists who sought to rid the country of the immoral institution. Nonetheless, this discourse failed to view free blacks and slaves as creative thinkers who in concert with white abolitionists navigated the underground railroad together. In Henrietta Buckmaster's view, only intelligent and trustworthy slaves and freedmen were tapped on the shoulder to assist conductors as an ally.<sup>8</sup> Her literature, subsequently

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<sup>6</sup> Michel Rolph Trouillot, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 122.

<sup>8</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, "Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and the Growth of the Abolition Movement," *The North American* 246, no. 1 (1941): pp. 142-149, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/25115012>, 146.

post-Civil War, regarded free colored men as the leaders over all black peoples who minded abolitionists as pure gold in the late 1830s.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the UGRR was a network of systems, however, it was shrouded in mythical language that told narratives of dark secrets, romanticized victories, and praise for abolitionists, while resorting to a soft undertone and language of sympathy for those who were enslaved. Buckmaster was an American civil rights activist, journalist, and novelist born in Cleveland, Ohio. Her most well-known book, *Let My People Go*, discusses how the underground railroad was shrouded in secrecy because few materials and documents were available to the public. While few historians reach back to her literature as a valuable source, *Let My People Go* offers key insight into how many writers about abolition saw enslaved blacks and fugitive slaves as docile and meek, without any self-determination, or bravery to take ownership of their lives. In addition, this article sheds light on the idea of intellect that Buckmaster along with Wilbur Siebert (one of the major sources used in her book) viewed the agents of the UGRR as Quakers and Calvinists who put “God’s law above the law of the land.” While her moral cause of freedom was deeply rooted in the Negro flight to freedom, her literature suggests that the black leadership consisted only of free peoples such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, and Robert Purvis, head of the General Vigilance Committee in Philadelphia. Her view of slaves as creative thinkers is missing. Her view of who succeeded and failed alongside white abolitionists is also absent.

When scholars leave out the trials and tribulations of violence, rape of women, and the lynching of slaves in the lower South makes for a positive literature, a literature that translates as

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<sup>9</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, *Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and the Growth of the Abolition Movement* (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press u.a., 1993), 106-107.

a victorious history. Buckmaster considered the UGRR a sophisticated enterprise that ran swiftly and smoothly.<sup>10</sup> This article borrows from her book that gave way to the ideals of many white abolitionists and civil rights activists who prided themselves on freeing the meek and mild. Scholars often discussed underground routes toward Canada that consisted of horrible climate conditions as routes leading slaves to poverty and disease.<sup>11</sup> However, in the late twentieth century, historians paid more attention to abolitionists who rejected the colonization idea.<sup>12</sup> Records of freedmen who told personal accounts of their experiences to prominent agents such as William Still while passing through Philadelphia reveal that many successes came from those who absconded across northern borders.

Whether slaves feared losing their lives, whipping posts, or armed men tracking with dogs, they held great conviction in their hearts for liberty and freedom, with many believing death was the true freedom from bondage. Buckmaster recognized the UGRR as an interracial movement, however, her scholarship discussed the interworking of the network as told by white abolitionist men post-Civil War who, again, prided themselves on their bravery, strength, and heroic actions. This notion indicates that slaves lacked self-determination, bravery, and the will to take ownership of their own lives. Academics are reminded by authors such as Manisha Sinha, who suggests in her book *The Slaves Cause: A History of Abolition*, that resistance of slavery is credited to those who were in bondage at its inception.<sup>13</sup> In addition she argued that “the insidious divide between

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<sup>10</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, 108.

<sup>11</sup> Henrietta Buckmaster, “Let My People Go: The Story of the Underground Railroad and the Growth of the Abolition Movement,” *The North American* 246, no. 1 (1941): pp. 142-149, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/25115012>, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Larry Gara, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 221.

white thought and black activism that pervades some books on abolition is both racist and inaccurate.<sup>14</sup> Instead of scholars questioning the sources in archives, many continue to add to the narrative rather than debate it. Why does America tell only the stories of the victor, commemorate them, and leave out other key actors who contribute to the historical analysis? Why is American history a one-sided story?

William Still, an African American activists, clerk, and chairman of the Vigilance Committee of Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society culminated research on the UGRR through interviews that placed fugitive slaves center stage for the first time. Historians such as Eric Foner, John Hope Franklin and Larry Gara have used Still's primary sources, which consists of legal documents, transcribed speeches, sketches, and rewritings, to debunk the traditional romanticized narrative written by white abolitionists during the nineteenth century. This work sheds light on the true representation slaves' experiences. William Still's first publication of slave narratives appeared in 1872. According to author Ian Frederick Finseth, slave narratives had existed for more than a century by the time notes from Still's narratives and first-hand accounts surfaced in the archives.<sup>15</sup> Finseth suggests that past scholarship and its inaccuracies presumed that African Americans had the "incapacity for freedom." These personal stories add more context to this history and go beyond the original accounts of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Thomas Garrett.

The emerging historical narrative of the UGRR pushed in academia dating back to the late-nineteenth century have been debunked by primary resources, which would otherwise remain

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<sup>14</sup> Manisha Sinha, 139.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Frederick Finseth, *William Still: The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 48.



buried in the archives, and now add to the historicity of the network. Finseth called this a renewal of the black community filled with published testimony and correspondence.<sup>16</sup> According to Gara, “The under-ground railroad is accepted on faith as part of America’s Heritage.”<sup>17</sup> Larry Gara’s, *The Liberty Line* interpretation after careful examination argued that the underground railroad was a combination of both fact and fiction. His interpretation of these legends and myths are described as melodramatic--a drama that would have been far too complex to fit in the true narrative of slaves.<sup>18</sup> In addition, he argued that many historians, past and present, have often borrowed from these folklore accounts that aid in continuation of the UGRR myths. Furthermore, these myths relegate fugitive slaves and African Americans to date to a secondary role in efforts to overcome their struggles. Moreover, he notes that the heroic efforts of the UGRR have been credited to white abolitionist men and women that highlight their bravery and unselfish acts at the center of this history. Originally published in 1961, Gara’s inspiration derived from stories and histories of the movement, often lost in magazines and newspapers, that tended to steamroll over the agency of fugitive slaves and their audacious decisions to pursue their quests for freedom.

While praising the likes of William Siebert and his valuable primary sources that detail legendary accounts of runaway slaves and abolitionists, Gara sharply discredits Siebert’s argument that they were passive in their aspirations for liberation. He concludes that the underground railroad was not as organized and professional as Siebert claims in his monograph, but instead recognized that slaves had clear motives. Most impressive is his interpretation of Canada as a symbol of recolonization due to the fear of kidnapping free black peoples and fugitive slaves in

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Finseth, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Gara, 102

<sup>18</sup> Larry Gara, 113.

New York who were often caught and returned to their masters. Canada as a destination for many blacks who escaped enslavement, according to Gara, was a new life with the promise of political and economic opportunity. Gara's argument is predicated on self-reliance, courage, individual initiative, and confidence of fugitive slaves to carve their own lane, not under the auspices of white abolitionists who often urged fugitives to remain in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

The resurgence of fugitive slaves, abolitionists, and the underground railroad, according to Eric Foner has become a popular discourse in public history.<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that the definition of freedom had a different meaning for slaveholders compared to blacks who were enslaved. Slaveholders wanted freedom to enslave, and blacks wanted freedom from enslavement. Undergraduate and graduate students have pondered why the United States did not see more rebellions, and when they did, why were they unsuccessful? I argue that the Underground Railroad was one of the largest rebellions before the Civil War. Lack of trust from both slaves and white abolitionists, who constructed operations under chicanery and trickery, created a U.S. rebellion that differed from that of Saint Domingue in 1793. It is no secret that the terms liberty and freedom were tossed around by Europeans and white southerners towards blacks for selfish reasons, to win a war with assistance from slaves and offering the promise of emancipation, to lure blacks to act as slave catchers in exchange for a promise for freedom, or to flat out lies to maintain order within the slave quarters.

However, the underground railroad and its methods were both legal and illegal systems of interracial bodies working together for the purposes of absconding from enslavement with the

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<sup>19</sup> Larry Gara, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Foner, 14.

hopes of gaining freedom and sometimes rejoining long lost family members. Gara posits that the slave escapes, as it pertains to the Underground Railroad, were a nonviolent action that succeeded without loss of life.<sup>21</sup> U.S. history is told from the side of the victor, in which the United States is always triumphant. In addition, because of American Exceptionalism and the silencing of history, it is imperative for the United States to bury the true historical narrative of slaves, their agency, and the will to free themselves from bondage. Historian John Hope Franklin dives into a synthesis on how plantation life functioned regarding human property, violence, attitudes of masters, financial woes of slaves who abandoned plantation life, the profile of runaway slaves and their life on the run, as well as their experiences being hunted and captured. Franklin agrees with Larry Gara's assertion that the underground railroad was not a well-organized transportation system, and notes that most runaway slaves were in the South and, thus, had few resources from white abolitionists. Franklin states that, "many runaway slaves fled with a sense of terrible urgency."<sup>22</sup>

Published in 1999, Gara seeks to debunk the myths and legends of runaway slaves by highlighting the self-determination of slaves who sought to free themselves from racial violence on plantations and analyzing the "motives and responses" from white southern plantation owners. Franklin argues that no discussion of plantation life can be complete without mentioning the severe punishments and brutality that slaves endured. In addition, Franklin states, from branding, mutilation, forced divisions of families, murder, and rape to the retaliation from slaves who participated in arson, thievery and escape, plantation life could not be summed up in the traditional

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<sup>21</sup> Larry Gara, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), xiii.

romantic descriptions of it.<sup>23</sup> Many historians were beginning to take a different view on the scholarship of slavery, negating past historians such as Ulrich B. Phillips who described the plantation as a “smooth, well-managed operation.” In addition, Franklin negates the argument from Kenneth M. Stampf who posited that slaves were a troublesome property or passive slaves who lived in unrest and unhappiness and, in his words, often refused to obey unreasonable demands and ran away. If the Underground Railroad was smooth and operated swiftly, as Buckmaster suggests, why were there slave patrols, why did the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 resurface from the eighteenth-century, why were slave holders adamant about constructing ways to end the practice of slaves running away at all? According to Franklin, his studies as compared to previous writings about runaway slaves show how slaves resisted with violence and how slaveholders responded brutally with the intent on demonstrating authority over them.<sup>24</sup> What is most unique about Franklin’s account on runaway slaves is how he conducted his study with what he described as “notices of runaways in newspapers and petitions to southern legislatures and county courts” rather than to rely on plantation records, journals and testimony from “prominent whites.” The bulk of his primary sources derived from legal histories and local journalism.<sup>25</sup>

Eric Foner, author of a recent regional history, resurrects the underground railroad in efforts to contribute to the recent addition of New York to study the complex networks of fugitive slaves, abolitionists, kidnapping and the financial incentives that followed, and the guidelines in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In his book *Gateway to Freedom*, Foner centers his study around the

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<sup>23</sup> John Hope Franklin, xiii.

<sup>24</sup> John Hope Franklin, xv.

<sup>25</sup> John Hope Franklin, 295.

public efforts shrouded in secrecy and illicit maneuvers that aided runaway slaves into New York City. He uses primary sources such as that produced by Sydney Howard Gay, the editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, who kept detailed records of how fugitive slaves moved through the upper South with an interracial group of people who assisted them along their journey.<sup>26</sup> Foner notes that, the term agents and officers were becoming ubiquitous in many of the writings found in local newspapers.<sup>27</sup> While recognizing that Larry Gara is the catalyst that broke the mold of traditional works on the Underground Railroad, Foner takes a different approach, homing in on the local networks of this movement, rather than add to the historical narrative that it was a grandiose institution of tunnels, codes, agents, and officers. The idea that the underground railroad was orchestrated as a great operation is reduced by Foner to local networks that succeeded and failed in their efforts to free slaves.<sup>28</sup>

Additional primary sources used in this book are both black and white abolitionists' newspapers, papers written by fugitive slaves, published records of fugitives and secondary sources to assist in debunking the exaggerated claims from previous historians. Past histories of the underground railroad fail to highlight the activities that cultivated Foner's research on the interworkings of fugitive slaves and white abolitionists in New York City's major metropolitan area--known today as Manhattan and the Bronx. Foner's efforts, detailing New York's connection with the institution of slavery and its investments in cotton, provide a much broader discourse of the Fugitive Slave Act passed by Congress on September 18, 1850. Often, historians give the North

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<sup>26</sup> Eric Foner, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Foner, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Foner, 15.

a pass on its participation in the enslavement of African Americans post-1776 and fail to recognize how intertwined the North was with the slave society in the South. Furthermore, recent scholarship has highlighted the economic advantages of cotton and slave labor in both the South and the North, and from a global perspective. While author Adam Rothman points out the contradictions found in the North in his book *Slave Country* when he notes that, although slavery was not a dominant social relation in the United States, white northerners argued that it was merely an obstacle for the future of a nation that threatened the economic development, national security, and the true virtue of the people.<sup>29</sup> However, Adam makes clear that the Union could not survive without the participation of the southern states, which halted the federal government from impeding the rights of slaveholders.<sup>30</sup> New York's major port was used as a trading post for goods and services that deeply entrenched the region in the southern ideals of free labor. It ultimately led to capturing fugitive runaway slaves and made way for the kidnapping of free black peoples (men, women, and children sold back to the South). This led to a regional decline in the black population, which derived from fear, government policy, and legislation.

Alice L. Baumgartner—author, professor, and scholar— challenges traditional causes of the Civil War by introducing the argument that Mexico's antislavery laws contributed to a major outbreak and “sectional controversy” between the North and South of the United States.<sup>31</sup> The author pores through a series of Mexican National Archives that discuss its antislavery laws, the state of free blacks, citizenship and the paralleled events that took place along the border that

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<sup>29</sup> Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Adam Rothman, 83.

<sup>31</sup> Alice L Baumgartner, *South to Freedom* (Basic Books, 2020), 12.

shaped the beginnings of the civil war. While no official Underground Railroad included Mexico, the author argues free blacks, ship captains and others assisted African slaves escaping from their slaveholders in the United States.<sup>32</sup> This work highlights the missing link of Mexico's role in the abolition of slavery in the United States and the sectional crisis created that ultimately led to the Emancipation Proclamation. Seldom do we tell the stories of slaves escaping to Mexico from Texas borders in public schools.

Is this not American history, Texas history? Mexico and U.S. relations as it pertained to southern slaveholders mid-nineteenth century stemmed from the threat to southern slaveholders' future prosperity dependent on slavery's existence. Baumgartner's collection of the Porter Papers provides further context into the lives of the Black Seminoles with a seven-hundred-page manuscript of extensive oral histories. Many historians who have written on the causations of the civil war in the United States fail to recognize the enslaved Africans who sought to escape bondage, flee to Mexico, and claim their freedom as a catalyst to the sectional crisis between the north and the south. They also fail to credit Mexico's strategic mental warfare that forced the United States to reconstruct its ideals on slavery and its expansion. Often, scholars devote their time debating whether economics or slavery were the cause of the civil war.

If we silence the history of how African Americans were locked out of wealth for over 400 hundred years due to slavery, teach our students in public school districts that slavery was African immigration and not forced labor, and create false narratives that fugitives who sought to escape the institution of slavery were meek, docile, and content individuals, it creates a dangerous interpretation of the souls of black people and buries all possibility of optimism for education and

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<sup>32</sup> Alice L Baumgartner, 8.

economic advancement. Racism that is hidden in legislation further aids in job bias, disparities in income and wealth, financial segregation from the perspective of community development, and mass incarceration as it relates to people of color. Essentially, history should be transparent to make the world a better place. However, the United States, rather than push a true historical narrative to achieve that goal, recycles a structure of fear. It drafts policies and creates legislation that aid in the inequality for people of color that would essentially provide more competition among whites in the workforce and limit social capital for people of color by reducing them to second-class citizenship.

Government officials in states such as Tennessee have recently banned the Holocaust book *Maus* from its 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. One may add that these steps are derived from white supremacists' ideologies in efforts to curtail the spread of such knowledge throughout U.S. grade schools. This notion of archival power is best explained in Michel Rolph-Trouillot's book, "*Silencing the Past.*" In an article written by Daniel Immerwahr, in response to a 2006 Florida bill by Governor Jeb Bush, that barred interpretation by historians in grade-level schools K-12 the author posits that beyond the facts that historians composite, there is something called narrative. Immerwahr states that narrative is a "structure of organizing factual work, hence the spine of factual work."<sup>33</sup> He challenges the bill and claims that history cannot be taught by facts alone. Without the interpretation of the facts, silences are created when actors are eliminated from the outset of the historical process.<sup>34</sup> This can be seen in the interpretations of the Underground Railroad in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholarship. Immerwahr

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<sup>33</sup> Immerwahr, Daniel. "The Fact/Narrative Distinction and Student Examinations in History." *The History Teacher* 41, no. 2 (2008), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Immerwahr, Daniel, 4.



provides two examples as evidence that add to his claim. First, the debate between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton that "labour in the earth are the chosen people of God." Second, the debates over the Civil War and Women in Politics to create an understanding of how narrative is important for historical thought and how it shapes laws and public policy in our country to date.<sup>35</sup>

An article written by Miya Shay for ABC News (KTRK) on November 2, 2021, discusses how Spring Branch ISD in Harris County pulled icon Ruby Bridges' book, *This Is Your Time*. This strike came down from Governor Greg Abbott's letter to the Texas Association of School Boards to "look into books that may contain 'pornography or other inappropriate' content"<sup>36</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw from her essays on Critical Race Theory in the section on "Serving Two Masters" suggests that "law is an undependable ally in the struggle of racial liberation."<sup>37</sup> The United States wants to rid the guilt of slavery and push the causations of racism far into the shadows through policy and legislation by silencing past historical content that still affects African Americans and other peoples of color. Right wing politicians in the twenty-first century are challenged by academic scholars, social media outlets, intelligent men, women, and adolescents alike, who no longer accept living in the shadow of white supremacy. In a world of information, it is imperative that right wing politicians curtail Critical Race Theory through law for them to maintain control. It is imperative for Professors like Denise Dallmar to continue to find ways to create primary and secondary grade level educational tools that add context to black history and other cultures.

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<sup>35</sup> Immerwahr, Daniel, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Another Book Pulled from Spring Branch ISD As Statewide Book Investigation Underway* (ABC 13, 2021), <http://abc13.com/amp/spring-branch-book-controversy-isd-books-library-banned-in-texas/11191799/>.

<sup>37</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010), 3.

Debunking the Underground Railroad was just a precursor of what is to become of black history and the historical narratives pushed by American ideals on the heels of its exceptionalism.

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